A "Blessed Reflex": Migration, African Christianity and *Missio Dei* in Freddy Macha's "The Drunk and the Preacher"

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Abstract

Freddy Macha's short story, "The Drunk and the Preacher," neatly captures the situation of the committed African Christian migrant in a secularized post-Christian Western society. It portrays the African believer as the "blessed reflex" spoken about by European missionaries at the beginning of the 19th century, who it was hoped would provide the European church with some, at the time unarticulated, future benefit. As it dramatizes the role reversal between African and Westerner as believer and non-believer and as evangelizer and evangelized, it also points to an African understanding of mission as participation by all believers in *missio Dei*, or the redemptive mission of God.

In the closing lines of the London-based Tanzanian writer Freddy Macha's story, "The Drunk and the Preacher," protagonist Renatus Mabutse finds himself under arrest for harassment. A Christian preacher and refugee in London from Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Renatus's offense is having repeatedly attempted to reach out to a panhandling street drunkard named Raymond, who happens to be the son of a wealthy man, inviting him to liberate himself from the self-destructive grip of alcohol by embracing the Gospel and Christian fellowship. As the police lead the handcuffed Renatus away, he begs to be allowed to take along "his only precious possession: the Bible" (14). He becomes, like Paul, a prisoner for the Gospel to which he has committed his life and which he hopes to reintroduce among the descendants of the people who first carried it to his own land. His story thus in part dramatizes an ironic role reversal between African and European as Christian believer and non-believer and as evangelizer and evangelized in a

secularized post-Christian contemporary Western society where religion has been largely banished from public life, relegated to the realm of private opinion. These African Christians living in the traditional lands of Christendom and witnessing through their daily lives to the Gospel would thus seem to be the "blessed reflex" predicted by early 19th century missionaries that would one day become a source of challenge and renewal to the mission-sending European churches (Shenk 105).

In the first decades of the great outpouring of mission enthusiasm that followed William Cary's founding of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, mission leaders began to speak of a "blessed reflex" or "reflexive action." That is, they predicted that their missionary efforts would result in some future benefit for the Western "sending" Churches from these new Churches arising in Asia, South America and Africa. What, precisely, this blessed reflex might be was never clearly articulated, and the term seems to have dropped out of use as quickly as it appeared. Nevertheless, over the years some have suggested it might mean that these new churches would become new centers for the Christian faith as the older European centers crumble, just as Europe itself became a center preserving and nourishing the faith of the older centers of North Africa and Turkey, which are now bereft of significant Christian presence (Ross 163). Others have predicted that these new churches with their radically different cultural traditions would offer, first to missionaries and then to the Western churches, new insights into, and understandings of, the demands and the meanings of the Gospel (Goheen, Gittins). Today still others are coming to see the current influx of non-Western, particularly African, Christians and missionaries into post-Christian Europe and North America as this anticipated blessed reflex that will challenge and bring about a renewal of the Western churches (Kwiyani, "Blessed Reflex" 42).[1] Each of these interpretations rings true since Christianity, as Jehu Hanciles correctly points out, is essentially a "migratory religion" ("Migration and Mission" 149; also *Beyond Globalization* 155). That is, from its Judaic birthplace Christianity was initially carried, by dedicated itinerate preachers and by ordinary believers alike, first to Asia Minor, North Africa, Rome, and even to India; next, throughout the expanses of the Roman empire and eastern Europe; then, in the European Age of Exploration, to the Americas, eastern Asia, the Pacific islands, and sub-Saharan Africa; until it literally reached every portion of the globe occupied by humanity, making Christianity today, in its various forms and confessions, the most

commonly shared faith on the planet.

Dana Robert suggests that what has made Christianity the most successful "world" religion today is that it is has succeeded time and again as a local religion (9). As believers entered new areas they were eager to share their good news with the local inhabitants they encountered. Freed, so to speak, by their Antioch experience (Acts 11.19–21) from the nationalist and cultic priorities of their Judaic brethren, freed from the demands of meticulous observance of the Jewish law and ritual, these migrants were more concerned with expressing and re-expressing their message in forms that these new recipients could comprehend: they were more concerned with allowing these new believers to understand, interpret, and then shape the message anew within their own particular circumstances. Thus, what appears on the surface to be a world religion is in fact "a mosaic of local beliefs and practices in creative tension with a universal framework shaped by belief in the God of the Bible, as handed down through Jesus and his followers" (Robert 9). It is this adaptability that has set Christianity apart and allows us to speak of a sort of worldwide Christian unity-in-variety: Orthodox Christianity, Western Christianity, Indian Christianity, Hispanic Christianity, Asian Christianity, African Christianity and the like; each unique in its culturally bounded forms of expression yet united in its core faith in the God of the Scriptures.

Concerning the arrival of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a frequently-repeated joke, often attributed to Jomo Kenyatta: "When the missionaries arrived in Africa they had the Bible and the natives had the land. One day they together closed their eyes and bowed their heads in prayer. When they opened their eyes again, the natives had the Bible and the foreigners had the land." What this joke is intended to communicate is the way in which Christianity has at times been manipulated by the colonizing powers to subdue, pacify and exploit Africans. Intentionally or otherwise, what it also points to is the fact that across the continent African peoples have enthusiastically embraced Christianity and made it their own.

It has been long recognized that Africa is the fastest-growing Christian continent on the planet. Since the beginning of the 20th century the Christian presence of Africa has grown from 9.2% of the population to 45.9% by 2000 (Barrett, Kurian and Johnson 13), and 60% if limited to the sub-Saharan non-Arab regions (Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnell 134). What is particularly striking

is that the vast majority of this expansion came in the postcolonial period: in 1900 there were approximately 10 million African Christians, by 1950, when African nationalism and the independence movements were coming to the forefront, this number had tripled to 30 million—and the most significant part of that growth was among the so-called African Initiated Churches (AIC), particularly those Pentecostal and charismatic in nature. By the start of the 21st century the number of Christians has increased tenfold to an estimated 360 million, and scholars estimate that by 2025 Africa will have over 600 million Christians, becoming the largest Christian continent in the world both in terms of percentage of the population and in sheer numbers.

The reasons for this explosion are many and complex. Scholars like Kwame Bediako, (176–177), Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator (140–141), Peter Nlemandim DomNwachukwu (11), and Laurenti Magesa (*African Religion* 25) all begin by noting that African peoples are inherently religious and spiritual in nature. They further suggest that Christianity has a special appeal to Africans because many of the characteristics of tradition African religions are found also in Christianity. Others stress the fact that the African encounter with the Gospel has been (ironically, some would say) a largely liberating experience that has little connection to the imperializing European powers associated with its introduction into African societies (e.g. Magesa, "Christ the Liberator" 162; Kolié 148). This notion is given some credence by the fact that the fastest growing sects tend to be those African Independent Churches formed by charismatic African preachers and prophets which, beginning already in the 1880s, broke away from the mainline churches established by European missionaries. These breaks were often over such cultural issues and practices as circumcision rituals among the Gikuyu of Kenya, which included female genital cutting that led to the so-called circumcision crisis of the 1920s. These churches, in particular, Harvey Kwiyani points out, in the past one hundred years have converted millions of Africans from traditional religions to Christianity (*Sent Forth* 56). Theirs is a faith that has fostered a sense of hope and a liberating mentality in the face of oppression and exploitation as well as poverty, disease and natural disaster. Indeed, most of the leaders of the anti-colonial movements of the mid-twentieth century were individuals educated in mission schools, and many of them practicing Christians, who found inspiration for their resistance movements in the Bible and in Christian doctrine. These include such

individuals as Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria), Kwame Nkruma (Ghana), Jomo Kenyatte (Kenya), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo (Zimbabwe), and Nelson Mandela (South Africa). Literary artists such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mongo Beti, John Munonye, and Dominic Mulasisho have also recognized the liberating power of Christianity and have exploited it in their texts to expose the hypocrisy of colonialism and to promote the cause of anti-colonial resistance.

Not only among the educated elite but among the poor and lowly educated masses as well, where traditional African religiosity remains particularly strong, Christianity has become the religion of hope, particularly when confronted with sickness and natural disaster. M P Moila, for instance argues that Africans look at "health, healing and sickness differently" from Westerners and notes how the emphasis on sickness and healing both in the Hebrew scriptures and in the earthly mission of Jesus has a special appeal for Africans (35). William Ondari, in turn, discusses the special appeal for Africans of the focus in both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, particularly Matt. 25.31–46, on poverty and wealth and the special love and concern God has for the poor (357).

As new African Christians emerged they have exhibited clear differences from their Western kinsmen. One of these differences is the very public nature of their faith lives. In the West a clear distinction and demarcation has been made between the public and the private, and religion, notes Babtunde Adedibu, "has largely been consigned to the private space" (40). France, of course, has long been renowned—some would say notorious—for its enforced secularization, as the controversies in recent years over the public wearing of Islamic garb and the displaying of religious symbols in schools clearly indicate. In the United States, as well, the traditional separation of church and state and the constitutional guarantee of freedom OF religion has increasingly become understood as freedom FROM religion, which has resulted in, for example, the seemingly enforced replacement of such religious greetings as Merry Christmas with the more generic Happy Holidays and to expanding the number of litigations against religious displays such as Nativity scenes or the Ten Commandments on public grounds. The separation may not seem as pronounced in Britain, where the Church of England remains the established church, where 26 Anglican bishops are ex officio members of the House of Lords, where formal prayer to open council meetings until recently

had long been an established practice, and where religious education remains a mandated subject in state schools. Nevertheless, the steady decline in church attendance and the more recent decline in church membership are clear indications of the retreat of religion—or at least Christianity—from the public domain.

This secular nature of Western societies, where minding one's own business, especially in matters of religion, is a positive value, is often confusing to African Christians. This is because African spirituality tends to be holistic and communal. Africans, Kwiyani suggests, have always lived in spirit-oriented cultures and so their Christianity will intentionally be holistic in its approaches to human life. Concerned not only with spiritual salvation, rather it overflows into the needs of the whole human being (*Sent Forth* 149). It touches every aspect of life as it is lived, whether it be planting and reaping; hunting and gathering; procreating, rearing and educating children; or engaging communally in the political, judicial, social and economic life of the village or clan. All are religious acts, Laurenti Magesa says, with no distinctions made (*African Religion* 25). So pervasive is this sense of religiosity that, writer Chimamanda Adichie says, a typical Sunday greeting among community members will include the question "Have you been to Church?" (88).

Salvation as well, Kwiyani says, is about "humanizing the entire person and helping that person become more whole in every sense of the word" (*Sent Forth* 159). It includes not only the spiritual, but also the physical, the emotional and even the economic among many other possibilities. African spirituality, thus, as Orobator suggests, is also communal (147). In prayer and worship, as in all other ecclesiastic and secular activities, Kwiyani says, there is no "I" but rather "We" (*Sent Forth* 164). For sure the individual is valued and personal salvation important, but "the idea of a strictly private or personal salvation" is difficult for Africans to comprehend (Orobator 147). Rather, the relationship with community is in itself an aspect and reflection of the relationship with God.

Because this holistic, communal spirituality is so pervasive across the continent, Kwiyani says, for African Christians "mission is inherent in their Christianity" (*Sent Forth* 70). However, their understanding of "mission" and being "a missionary" in their own lives differs dramatically from the way in which these terms had come to be used in the West, especially since the 16th century. Beginning with the Jesuit missions of the 16th century

and later with the various mission societies that sprang up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the idea of mission and missionary have been associated with the Great Commission of the Gospel of Matthew (28.19–20) and of specially designated individuals leaving their homeland to spread the Gospel overseas, thus expanding the Church. Africans, however, are leery of the term because of its associations with the colonial project. Rather, Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi suggests, for Africans the idea of mission is more closely associated with what has come to be known as *missio Dei*, or God's mission. Before the 16th century, he says, mission was understood "exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, of the sending of the Son by the Father, and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son" (24–25). In other words, mission was about God's redemptive work in the world: God sent the Word in the form of Jesus as a sojourner, a migrant if you will, to live among humanity and to affect God's redemption of humanity by becoming, as the prologue to John's Gospel so beautifully declares, a light for all people, a light to shine in the darkness and never be overcome by that darkness (John 1.4–5, 9). God and Jesus, in turn, now send the Holy Spirit to continue that redemptive work among humanity. While this redemptive work can and does include bringing the Gospel to the unevangelized on foreign soils, its primary meaning has been that of being part of God's redemptive work in one's daily life and in one's own community, of what David Bosch has described as "participation is the movement of God's love towards people, since God is a fountain of sending love" (389–390). In this regard, as Kwiyami says, "all Christians are missionaries" (*Sent Forth* 78), and, in a practical sense, we preach the Gospel by living it. We participate in God's redemptive mission by articulating and "humanising," in Kwiyani's words, the love of God in the daily courtesies, kindnesses, and concerns we show to others; by greeting, welcoming, and even sheltering the stranger; by feeding and clothing the hungry and needy; by acknowledging and respecting the human dignity of every individual we encounter; by living our individual vocations and fulfilling our obligations to the best of our individual abilities (Kwiyani, "Missio Dei" 61–62). Thus, even when African church communities send pastors abroad, it is not for the purpose of preaching to the unevangelized, as has often been the case among Western missionary groups. Rather, it is usually with the intention of providing spiritual care and support for their communal brothers and sisters who have emigrated to

these places.

This is not to say that African Christians are not interested in doing mission work among non-Africans. Quite the contrary: "African Christian spirituality is particularly optimistic about engaging with the stranger" (Kwiyani, *Sent Forth* 165), whether that stranger be one encountered in our own homeland or those we encounter in our sojourns abroad. For African Christians tend to see each new encounter as an opportunity appointed by God to extend the work of the *missio Dei*. And in fact today Africans from all parts of the continent are migrating around the globe for different reasons and purposes. Some, of course, are dedicated missionaries who have devoted their lives to carrying out the mission of evangelization and re-evangelization to lands where the Gospel has yet to be preached and back to the lands from which it was first brought to their own. In North America and Western Europe, for instance, more and more we are seeing Catholic priests (and, to a lesser extent, ministers of the mainline Protestant sects) from African and South Asian nations filling the pastoral roles these nations are no longer able fill themselves.[2] The vast majority of these migrants, however, are believers rather than ordained clergy, laymen carrying their faith with them. Some are students and businessmen, living abroad temporarily and intending to return (at least initially) to their own countries. Many are economic migrants, seeking a better life for themselves and their children, not unlike the European migrations beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing well into the twentieth century and reaching every shore of the globe. Still others, like Macha's character, are exiles and refugees from natural disaster and political, ethnic and religious persecution. Whatever the circumstances underlying their migratory status, as they move out of their continent they are taking their Christian faith with them and sharing it with the peoples among whom they are settling.

Engagement in *missio Dei* is never risk free, the least personally threatening risk being the possibility of rejection. This is particularly true for African Christian migrants in the West, where racial prejudice is never far. From the European perspective, Africa has long been the "Dark Continent." Its peoples, their cultures, including their religions, and their societies, are primitive and in need of enlightenment. This, in fact, was the raison d'etre justifying both the colonial project in general and the Christian mission. Even the saintly Albert Schweitzer is reported to have remarked that while acknowledging the African Christian is his

brother, he very clearly stressed that the African is the younger brother who needs to be properly guided in the meanings of the gospel.[3]

In recent years the symptoms of racial prejudice in society have become less obvious but have not disappeared altogether. Black people, and particularly African immigrants, are still regarded with suspicion in Western societies. Such things as their appearance, their diets, and their accents mark them as outsiders and immediately evoke suspicions of being criminals, refugees (political and economic), and beggars—until proven otherwise, which they are usually unable to prove. They are more likely to draw the attention, for example, of department store security, or of the police and other security forces such as immigration officials at the air and seaports; to be subjected to extra scrutiny by landlords and realtors as they try to lease accommodations or acquire property, or of bank officials as they seek to open bank accounts. Their Christianity as well—both their practices and their theologies—is often regarded with suspicion and disdain.[4] In mainline churches, for example, their liturgical celebrations are often regarded as irrationally emotional and inferior, while AICs in particular are frequently dismissed as syncretic, diluting the purity of the gospel with paganism. African theologies, like African literary traditions, tend to be oral, passed on by word of mouth. It is often heavily biblical—indeed, African Christians often know the bible inside out—but for Westerners lacks what they see as intellectual sophistication. Finally, as African Christians abroad settle in different areas they naturally tend to seek out people with whom they share common backgrounds, common languages, and common traditions. At some times they will form independent church communities while at others they will become culturally distinct groups within a local church. In either case, intentionally or otherwise, they become communities within communities that the local population finds "foreign," difficult to penetrate, and perhaps even intimidating. Thus the African Christian migrant remains an outsider, and often a not-necessarily-welcome one.

Freddy Macha's short text neatly captures the situation of the African Christian migrant in the West. Today Macha himself may or may no longer be a practicing Christian or even a believer. Nevertheless, information that can be gleaned from his blog and newspaper columns clearly demonstrates that he comes from a faith background, which has had a powerful formative effect on his outlook. Born and raised in the shadows of Mt. Kilimanjaro late in Tanzania's colonial period and

apparently a fourth-generation Christian, he is the grandchild of a well-known and respected Lutheran pastor whom he said preached and lived a life of "eternal love" ("Turbulent Times"). Elsewhere he has reminisced about his childhood, fondly recalling significant events in the life of his church community such as singing in choir or attending Christmas mass ("Christmas fever"). A resident of London since 1996, as a musician, writer, artist, and language teacher Macha has been active in educational projects for children and in serving those in prisons and young offenders' institutions as a translator and educator (School Select). Further, in his blog and newspaper columns he at times quotes the Bible, and there are as well hints that he continues today to identify with and participate to some degree in church community in London ("Looking Forward"). That is, whatever Macha's personal faith may be, whatever his commitment to formal membership in a church community, the Gospel-inspired values and practices of his youth seem to continue to shape his values and practices today.

The protagonist in Macha's story, Renatus Mabutse, is a migrant Christian preacher in London. His name, Renatus, literally means "born again." Associated in origin with the 5th century martyr Renatus of Sorrento, the name has a spiritual rather than literal meaning; that is, to be born again in baptism, from water and the Holy Spirit, and further suggests the character's identity as an evangelical, and probably Pentecostal or charismatic, Christian. The fact that he is identified as "a preacher" instead of a priest or minister adds hints of strong Biblicism and perhaps even a self-appointed mission, as opposed to hints of theological education, ordination and formal pastoral appointment that priest or minister would suggest.

His family name, Mabutse, and his family's connections with nationalist leader Joshua Nkomo in turn link him with the Ndebele-speaking people, Zimbabwe's second largest ethnic group and largely the victims of Mugabe's post-independence "Shona takeover" that resulted in the massacre of tens of thousands of ethnic Ndebele in the Matabeleland regions of western Zimbabwe. His family history insofar as it is revealed suggests him to be something of an African everyman whose story reflects the suffering of the various African peoples: from his refuge in London he recalls "dead cousins, dead sisters, dead grandparents, dead father all wiped by Mugabe people" and his "gallant mother" who "died in the war against Ian Smith in the late 1970s" (11–12). He recalls as well a sister, Mavitu, who at the age of twenty is already an HIV widow with two children and forced to " 'working'

in Zambia. Selling herself for money" (13). His wanderings in exile bring him first to Kenya where he encounters similar ethnic violence, with what appears to be allusions to the 2008 massacre in Eldoret of Kikuyus who had taken refuge in a church and to similar election-related violence in Nakuru. Eventually he lands in London.

The events narrated are set in East London, early in the administration of Boris Johnson, the flamboyant Tory Lord Mayor whose reputation for making racially provocative remarks is perhaps exceeded today only by Donald Trump and whose electoral success is said to have been based largely on support of White voters from the outlying boroughs such as those of East London. The specific location mentioned, the corner of Durley Road and Rochester Avenue, is fictional—these two roads neither intersect nor run near each other—yet they nevertheless narrow the setting down to the adjoining boroughs of Newham and Hackney, which the 2011 census indicates are rapidly becoming the most ethnically diverse areas in the country. In these boroughs individuals who describe themselves as "White British" still make up the largest ethnic group. However, today they are no longer a majority. Ethnic diversification has brought with it religious diversification as well, with Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and African Christian communities rapidly increasing and expanding—and, notably, they are all communities for whom the practice of their religion is a central aspect of their lives. Ironically, the numbers of individuals reporting no religion is on the rise as well (9.5% in Newham and 28.2% in Hackney [Mayor of London]), primarily among those who identify as "White British."

The antagonist is one Raymond Budgeons, identified simply as "the son of the famous millionaire" (14). Presumably he is White British, and the similarity of names makes it tempting to link him to the founders of the Budgens supermarket/convenience store chain. What is known is that he hangs around on an East London street corner, panhandling and drinking a high-alcohol beer identified as Special Brew, presumably the inexpensive Carlsberg product often associated with street alcoholics in Britain.[5] He also harbors strong racial resentments, regularly hurling abusive and offensive language at Renatus, calling him a "nig nog" and "shit head" and telling him to "piss off" or "go back to [his] own country" every time Renatus tries to reach out to him. Notably, the narrator adds, Renatus is the only one who seems to care about or extend a helping hand to Raymond: everyone else

is "dead pan" to his antics, "minding their own business" as he directs his abuse at Renatus (12).

British society and culture is highly individualistic and private, and in such a society it is generally considered the height of good manners to mind one's own business—in its worst permutations to the point of allowing others to engage unchallenged in self-destructive behavior. Renatus, on the other hand, as a "devoted Christian ... never looked away. Never shied from troubles" (12). Rather, he was raised in a cultural, social, and religious environment which places a greater emphasis on community membership and mutual responsibility (see DomNwachukwu 141, 189 and elsewhere; Magesa, *African Religion* 52–53, 57–58, 64–68, 104–114, 259–263 and elsewhere). It is a social and religious environment, Orobator says, that "promotes the values of hospitality, sharing, solidarity, welcoming, and so on" (87); values, he suggests, that are characteristically African and characteristically Christian and mark in part the appeal of Christianity and the Gospel message to the traditional African sense of religiosity. Thus, the fact that Renatus is rebuffed by Raymond for his efforts to reach out to him in itself is not surprising or even ironic: that he is faced with legal consequences, however, is.[6] His arrest is a clear indication of the extent to which secularization and, perhaps more importantly, radical individualism in Western societies, has cultivated a certain degree of hostility to religion, banishing it from—or at least pushing it to the periphery of—public life and public dialogue, compartmentalizing it as a matter of personal opinion. Such a sense of individual autonomy, one that places restraints on religious expression, is alien to most African cultures. While each individual is endowed with specific gifts and possibilities, no individual exists exclusively for him- or herself. Rather, each is expected to contribute positively to the community's well-being, to take a share of responsibility for all of the members (DomNwachukwu 189). Thus, for most Africans the entire religious experience is a public phenomenon, and for African Christians in particular there is a certain optimism about engaging with the stranger, as I have already noted, because each new encounter represents a new opportunity to serve God's will in the *missio Dei*.

In the end, then, the fact that Renatus asks to be allowed to keep his Bible and that he considers it his only possession of worth, speaks volumes about the place of Christian faith in the lives of contemporary Africans. That he is

persecuted and prosecuted for living out his Christian convictions in the lands of Christendom, in the lands from which those convictions were first carried to his people, is ironic at least. And the personal relationship between Renatus and Raymond, between the preacher and the drunk, between the product of a contemporary non-Western Christian culture and the product of what Lesslie Newbigin referred to as contemporary Western "pagan" society (221), speaks volumes about the role reversal of European and African as evangelizer and evangelized. Macha's little sketch thus becomes a compact metaphor for the state of Christianity in contemporary Europe and Africa. It dramatizes in a succinct way African understanding of Christian commitment as participation in the *missio Dei*.

History books are full of stories about the dedicated missionary heroes who led the transformation of Christianity from a tiny Judaic sect born two thousand years ago in the Galilean backwaters of the Roman empire into a world religion that today reaches every inhabited region of our planet. Often overlooked in those histories are the roles played in that transformation by ordinary believers who migrated for various reasons to new lands, bringing with them their faith which they gladly shared with the peoples among whom they settled. So successful has been that transition that today the demographic center of Christianity has shifted from its European incubator to the global south. In turn, the routes of migration are also reversing. Increasingly, people are migrating, for myriad reasons, from these newly Christianized countries in the global south to the traditional lands of Christendom and to other economically developed nations to the north. And like all migrants before them, they bring with them their religious beliefs and practices. Wherever they settle, they offer in their daily lives witness to their experience and their understanding of the Gospel, and their presence often contributes to a revitalization and a renewal of the faith communities already present.[7] Among them, in turn, are writers, the vast majority of whom were raised in Christian families and today reside, either permanently, temporarily, or part-time, in those same traditional lands of Christendom: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sindiwe Magona, Chris Abani, Uwem Akpan, Helon Habila and Helen Olajumoke Oyeyemi are some of the more prominent names that come to mind. Some are deeply religious—indeed, Akpan is a Jesuit priest—while others still identify strongly with the religious background in which they were raised, even if

they no longer practice.[8] Their works, in turn, at times borrow North American or European settings and reflect the migrant experience of their people. The characters they create are usually simple people of faith, trying to live out that faith in a strange land. And in their characters they offer Western readers new and perhaps unique ways of understanding the Gospel message and the Christian way of life.

Note

1 Harvey Kwiyani believes this idea of non-Western missionaries re-evangelizing a de-Christianized West never actually occurred to these 19th century church leaders (*Sent Forth* 72).

2 Indeed, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the largest Catholic seminary and graduate school of theology in the world, Bigard Memorial Seminary with three campuses and over a thousand students, was to be found in Nigeria at Enugu (Jenkins 67).

3 Chinua Achebe, in particular, has repeated this several times. See *Hopes and Impediments* 10–11, and also 69.

4 See, for example, Kwiyani, *Sent Forth* 180; Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom* 129–130; Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 119–120.

5 Although the text describes it as 13%, Special Brew is currently sold at 7%; until 2015 its maximum was 9% (Rowe).

6 Initially I was rather skeptical that behavior like that of Renatus could be considered harassment or even have legal consequences. However, beginning in 1986 Parliament enacted the Public Order Act, the first of a series of bills concerning harassment, including religious harassment, and proscribing certain behavior. What is interesting is that these bills have gradually refined the definition of harassing behavior to constitute anything the plaintiff may perceive as "violating [his/her] dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment" (United Kingdom 14). The ordinances have been used over the years to shield, for example, sexual or religious minorities from aggressive proselytizing activities, as might be expected. More recently, however, they have been used in one instance to arrest a Baptist preacher for publicly citing biblical passages calling homosexual activity sinful (Blake), in another to prosecute a hotel owner for engaging a Muslim guest in a religious discussion (Bingham), and in still a third to arrest a politician for citing a passage from Churchill that was critical of Islam (Evans). In light of these sorts of incidents the arrest of Renatus becomes somewhat more plausible.

7 My own Catholic parish in Nagoya, Japan is perhaps a typical example of this demographic shift. The so-called International community that started the regular Sunday mass in English was, some forty-five years ago, dominated by North Americans and Europeans,

with a smattering of Filipinos. Today Westerners form a minority: South and Southeast Asians (Filipinos, Indians, and Indonesians) and Africans (Ghanaians, Nigerians, Ugandans and Malawians) together make up the majority. The parish clergy as well reflects this shift. Forty-five years ago the pastor and associates were Westerners, with perhaps one Japanese priest in residence. Today the pastor is Japanese while the associates are Vietnamese, Chinese, Indonesian, and Ghanaian, with a retired Englishman also in residence.

8 Adichie, for instance, has acknowledged that, despite her disagreements with particular aspects of Catholic teaching, for her Catholicism is something she "can never get rid of" ("A Conversation" 91). Chris Abani has made similar statements about his relationship with Catholicism as well. See Chris Abani, "An Interview."

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